2009 LISTENING SESSION POLICY

On January 8, 2009 Montana Tree Farm and Montana Forest Owners Association held its bi-annual Legislative Listening session. The goal of this session is twofold, firstly, to educate landowners on upcoming policy issues, secondly to provide a forum for state legislators to interact and become familiar with forest landowners across the state. The outcome of the listening session was the development of position statements on issues of concern that will be addressed in both State and National legislative processes.

Statements drafted at Leg. Listening session 1-8-09 (submitted to Legis.)

1. Forest management activities that reduce high fuel loading and provide access for equipment and personnel improve wildland fire suppression effectiveness, thereby improving public safety and health and reducing suppression costs. Private forest landowners who actively manage their forested lands (as proven with a written management plan and active management activities) to reduce fuels that contribute to extreme fire behavior should be provided with recognition of their proactive contribution towards reducing wildland fire costs. We recommend a 50% forest property tax reduction for qualifying ownerships. Landowners must apply by showing proof of forest management plan(s) and active management activity to qualify.

2. A detailed review conducted by members of the Montana Forest Owners Association, Montana Tree Farm system and several independent academic reviewers of the Headwaters Consulting Group wildfire suppression cost study, that was contracted by the Montana Legislative Sub-Committee on Wildfire Suppression Costs, has shown the study to be fraught with so many incorrect assumptions and mistakes of basic statistical analysis that it is essentially of no real value in ascertaining the elements that affect the cost of fires.

3. In order to improve fire hazard reduction practices (thinning and fuels reduction), opportunities for safely burning residue of fuel hazard mitigation projects in rural and remote areas should be extended to include the time period between December 1 and March 30.

4. With reference to the new Montana forestland tax assessment landowner notification of for each zone and class of the proposed forest land reappraisal must include valuation calculations so that landowners can independently verify the productivity classes assessed for their forests.

5. With respect to newly proposed legislative action; Forest landowners support voluntary and incentive based programs to influence forest stewardship versus penalty or fee based regulation.

6. Montana private forest landowners support a competitive wood products industry since this offers the best mechanism through which we can actively manage our lands for fire hazard reduction and other practices that enhance and maintain Montana forest quality and public benefit. To help support the Montana wood products infrastructure we suggest that all taxpayer sponsored construction projects offer preference to Montana manufactured wood products. We support active management of our federal and state lands to the same standards for fire .